Letter from Mabel Hubbard Bell to Alexander Graham Bell, June 8, 1901, with transcript, with transcript

Letter from Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell to Dr. Alexander Graham Bell. GRAND HOTEL, Beau-Rivage, Geneve. 8, June 1901. My dear Alec:

I had an unusual experience today, what do you think of it.

Having a little spare time Mamma and I drove out of town to the Institution des Sour? s Muets. It is a beautiful place, we went up a long shady avenue of tall trees, to rather a small but pleasant looking house. A pleasant looking woman came to the open door and said that the inspector and the director were holding examinations and could not be disturbed, would we come to a seat under the trees. I did not have my card, but Mamma explained that I was Madame Graham Bell, and I made her add that my husband was the founder of the Volta Bureau of which Mr. Hitz was the head. She said the name was quite familiar, and then we sat and talked for a while and then she said she would tell her husband, the director, perhaps I would like to see the examinations. I said that was what I particularly desired to do as my husband had unfortunately never been in Europe in the proper time to examine schools himself and I was sure he would be glad of my report. So we went in to the school room, a pleasant airy room. Two chairs were waiting for us at the bottom of the room, at the head three men were examining two small children in the geography of Germany. Half a dozen other children at their desks arose instinctively as we entered, but were immediately ordered by the school mistress to reseat themselves, while the three men deigned no notice whatever of us. Finally the two children were dismissed and the lady went up to one of the men and whispered to him. He 2 hesitated but finally followed her to us without a word to the other men. Arrived he bowed and waited for us to speak very negligently. Mamma explained again who I was, he said that he had been at the Paris conference and had met you several times then, and knew of

me. He also admitted having heard of the Volta Bureau, having occasionally received papers from it, but he did not know much about it. He did not know that I had written a paper on speech-reading which had been translated into French, and very evidently didn't care. There were sixteen children in the school, all orally taught, had been since 1855, average course lasted eight years, the children left at sixteen generally and did not continue their education afterwards. The very young children to whom the lady teacher spoke had natural voices Mamma said and spoke very well, the elder ones, the boy and girl of twelve or thirteen who had been under the examiners cross-fire seemed bright, happy and entirely interested, but did not speak so distinctly or in so natural voices. The examiners mouthed to them as Miss Yale's teachers never do, but not more than many American teachers. The lady teacher showed us the slate of one of the bigger girls, one in her sixth school year. It was about the cow, in such simple French as to be entirely within my very limited comprehension. She also showed us some of the girls sewing. Nothing more seemed forthcoming, M.le Directeur stood there, apparently content to stand as long as we liked to stay, but with no remarks to make. Over at the table the other two men looked over big sheets of paper leisurely. I remarked that I would not detain M.le Directeur further. He bowed negligently and stirred not while his wife escorted us to the gate. Well — I have never been received in that way before anywhere, certainly not 3 in an Institution for the Deaf, and to put it mildly, I was surprised. It wasn't only that I have been accustomed to think of Madame Graham Bell as a person of some importance, or that teachers of the deaf have made me feel that I, myself, was worth some attention, but more important than all, and most impersonally, it seemed to me that the directors of this Geneva school should have been overjoyed at the chance Providence threw in their way of comparing their pupils with a specimen of American work. Whether it was good, bad or indifferent was not so much to the point. And that I came when they were engaged in examining their pupils was to my thinking all the more reason why they should have welcomed my coming. For though the letter of an examination might be the geography of Germany, or the arithmetic of twice two and two make four, the object of it surely is to discover what progress the scholars have made towards ability to mingle with their fellow men. And the

measure of the success a teacher had made of his work is comparison with the work of teachers elsewhere. If they are doing as well or better than I, then the examiners may fairly hope that the utmost is being done for their pupils. If they fall short of my standard, the utmost has not been done. Why is that not a better test than any arithmetic or geography, and one far less readily applied? Well apparently the gentlemen did not think so. But I do not feel so sure that anyone but the director and his wife knew that I was deaf. You may say, I can't be sure they knew who I was without my card, but that does not matter. They knew I was deaf, a stranger“sounds muet” and yet they did not care. They did not show my Mother and myself the politeness one might imagine the due of two ladies who had testified to their interest in the deaf by 4 by driving so far out to see them. The examination and the recording of name of two children was too important to be interrupted by so much as a civil bow. I thought if this was a good specimen of the standing of the orally taught deaf of Europe I did not blame Mr. Heidseik for wishing for a change. Yet the children looked intelligent and eager. The school mistress said to one of the little girls “Chaise” “Chaise” and she brought me a chair. But would not Miss Yale's teacher have said “Bring the lady a chair”? I saw no signs.

My pride seems to need humbling apparently. This afternoon Mamma and I went to inquire of Cooks whether they had heard about our steamer tickets. The answer was no, and then“what tickets do you want?” “I said first class outside — “But it is thirty-two pounds.” “all right.” But do you understand that first class outside cabins are thirty-two pounds, do I understand that you want first class outside?” “The gentleman who was here did not say what class”! Apparently Cook's young man doubted my ability to pay thirty-two pounds or my eligibility to a first class outside cabin! Yet I thought myself very well dressed and unmistakeably a lady. Do you feel troubled least your wife has somehow degenerated since last winter? I told the man that I wanted to sail next Saturday even if there was no first class outside cabins left, and I mean to go. I don't want to delay a day longer now, but hardly think I could descend to the second cabin.

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Daisy and Gip and Charles have gone to Zermatt, I wanted Daisy to see something of the Swiss mountains at close quarters. Mamma and I are staying here quietly. We drive every evening and every evening go a new road, I never knew a city with so many beautiful 5 and different drives,

I have got myself into trouble with Mr. Fernod. He thought I ought to have taken his friend as Gip's singing teacher without either hearing or seeing her and is mad that I didn't see things in the same light. Daisy has got into trouble with her Ernesto because she accused him of getting somebody else to write his English letters to her. Altogether it is time we came home. Daisy has only four full length photographs of Ernesto, and are colored.

Much love to you all, Lovingly ever, Love to my little girl. Did you and she get my letters, sent simply to Atlantic City.